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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: KREMLIN NON-AGGRESSION PACT WITH THE COMMUNIST  
PARTY

REF: MOSCOW 2582

Classified By: Political M/C Alice Wells. For reason 1.4 (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Communist Party (KPRF) contacts suggest that the Kremlin has agreed not to interfere in the party's election campaign efforts, in exchange for the KPRF's agreement to eschew direct criticism of Putin. While some view this as an effort by Kremlin Presidential Administration Deputy Vladislav Surkov to reduce the popularity of the KPRF's erstwhile rival, Just Russia (SR), at least one Kremlin-connected analyst attributes the Communists' recent successes to the invigorating effect of party competition. While KPRF leader Zyuganov complains publicly about his party's lack of media access, we are struck by the rank and file's optimism in the lead up to the fall electoral season. End summary.

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Kremlin Support for KPRF?  
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¶2. (C) On June 6, Ilya Ponomarev, head of the KPRF's Information Technology Center, told us that KPRF Chairman Gennadiy Zyuganov has been regularly meeting with the Kremlin and had arrived at an understanding which would allow the party to run a mildly oppositional campaign that it hoped would result in increased representation in the new Duma. In a June 8 meeting, SR Duma Deputy Gennadiy Gudkov underscored his party's suspicions that KPRF had some form of Kremlin support, given the Communists' increased access to national media and Kremlin invitations to participate in high profile policy fora. Since the Kremlin has determined that it "can do business" with Zyuganov, Ponomarev said that the pressure from some in the KPRF leadership to ease him out of the party has diminished. Ponomarev indicated, however, that the KPRF rank-and-file were not universally pleased with the conditions attached to the Kremlin's support, such as a ban on criticizing Putin directly. (NOTE: While Ponomarev did not go into the details of the KPRF's "deal," its outline resembles the SPS "accord" as described in reftel.)

¶3. (C) Both Ponomarev and Gudkov asserted that the KPRF's improving fortunes were due to increased support for the party by Presidential Administration Deputy Vladislav Surkov, who had not favored the initial decision to create SR. Surkov's reluctance allegedly could be traced to the Kremlin's earlier experience with Rodina. When Rodina captured the imagination of Russia's nationalists during the Moscow City elections of December 2005, the Kremlin's ardor for the party immediately cooled, Ponomarev related.

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14. (C) Panorama political analyst Grigoriy Belonuchkin was less confident about KPRF's prospects. He suggested in a June 7 conversation that there were no guarantees that the Kremlin would, in the end, honor deals reportedly made with second-tier contenders like KPRF, SR, LDPR, and SPS. In any event, Belonuchkin said, any agreements were likely to be in the form of a promise "not to interfere" rather than to assist any of the second-rank parties. Center for Political Technologies Deputy General Director Sergey Mikheyev concurred, and stressed that the Kremlin's real focus is the nationalists, who are more dangerous primarily because they have no one leader against whom pressure can be brought to bear.

15. (C) The Kremlin-connected Director of the Center for Elections Politics Gleb Pavlovskiy insisted to us that the Presidential Administration's role in bolstering the KPRF was exaggerated. One of the great unanticipated consequences of creating Just Russia, he noted, was its galvanizing effect on the KPRF base. The Communists mobilized effectively in the March 2007 regional elections, he said, due to the need to secure their base from SR poaching. Pavlovskiy asserted that the Kremlin had no interest in destroying the Communists, because many of the party's members would then drift towards extremism, and not towards SR leader Sergey Mironov's corporate-style leftism. If the Communist party had reformed itself years ago, as sought by Putin, Pavlovskiy maintained that the Kremlin would not have had to go to the trouble of creating Just Russia. At the regional level, we were told by Stavropol KPRF regional leader Viktor Goncharov that party members are feeling the pressure of political competition, as

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both SPS and SR targeted what has been a secure Communist Party vote bank.

16. (C) Tatyana Stanovaya, an analyst at the Center for Political Technologies, told us June 15 that the Kremlin's only goal was to avoid a United Russia constitutional majority in the next Duma. Beyond that it was indifferent to which party -- SR or KPRF -- finished second. Igor Bunin, the Center's Director, said their polling data and focus groups still put the Communists slightly behind SR's projected 12-15 percent in a Duma election.

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KPRF's Campaign Strategy  
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17. (U) Although the KPRF may have the Kremlin's agreement not to interfere, the party's central leadership remains frustrated by the KPRF's inability to get airtime on government television and radio channels. In a June 20 press conference, KPRF Chairman Gennadiy Zyuganov cited the media as KPRF's "real opponent" in the upcoming elections. He called on the journalists present to highlight the "corruption and fraud" behind their coverage.

18. (U) At his press conference, Zyuganov claimed that the party had solidified its support in the cities and would spend the summer shoring up its flagging rural support. In the autumn, he said, attention would turn to veterans and pensioners. The culmination of its campaign will be during the November holidays, when KPRF will discuss the results of its Duma initiatives.

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Comment  
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19. (SBU) The most striking feature of the recent conversations is the general sense of confidence among party-linked interlocutors, perhaps traceable to the alleged

understanding reached with the Kremlin; the general drift of other parties to the left, a part of the spectrum where the KPRF is first among equals; the continuing poor poll ratings of SR; and the KPRF's relatively strong showing in the March regional elections. Adding to that confidence may be the party's proven ability to run an effective campaign in the regions and aggressively monitor the results of its campaign efforts during Russia's often unreliable polling process.

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